

tests a typical psychic claim and shows the claim to be false. Surely if these 'psychic detectives' really had the powers they claim then the objects they were encouraged to handle should have given them at least a few clues about the crimes that we know had been committed. But they did not. Another fascinating story involves Wiseman's investigations into the claims of miracles by Indian godmen. For example, Sri Sathya Sai Baba has over 20 million devotees, worldwide. He routinely 'materializes' holy ash and produces small trinkets out of nowhere—sometimes he even 'materializes' valuable objects made of gold or other precious materials. Though frequently suspected of fraud, he has never been directly caught cheating.

In 1992 an Indian newspaper claimed to have film footage showing Sai Baba using trickery when he apparently materialized a gold watch and gave it to the Prime Minister. Opponents of Sai Baba were delighted at the exposé and the story spread, even to *The Independent* newspaper, which said that the film showed "tawdry sleight-of-hand". Wiseman and Erlendur Haraldsson showed that the truth was not so simple. The film was poor quality and reveals only enough detail to conclude that trickery could have occurred—not that it definitely did.

Obviously, better observations and controlled studies are needed, and Wiseman reports several in which he and Haraldsson tried to track down other godmen and women and get them to produce the holy ash inside a plastic bag, or when filmed by magicians. Their travels make fascinating reading though they did not return with convincing film of either miracles or fraud. In all these examples Wiseman is wisely cautious in his conclusions. His investigations reveal the difficulty of getting unambiguous evidence of psychic fraud and the importance of designing experiments carefully and with respect for the needs of the claimants.

There are many other interesting papers in this book, including tests of the SORRAT claims, experimental investigations into séance-room phenomena, and studies of what people recall after pseudopsychic demonstrations. In spite of its shortcomings *Deception and Self-Deception* is an interesting and useful collection.

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URI GELLER: MAGICIAN OR MYSTIC? by Jonathan Margolis. Orion Media, The Orion Publishing Group Ltd., 1998. 296pp. £18.99 (hardback).

We all knew about Uri Geller, didn't we? Who could have escaped the mangled cutlery, the publicity hype, the wild claims, the counterclaims (with good old James Randi growling in the sceptic undergrowth of the psi jungle), and the seemingly endless court cases? What was the man behind it all like, though? Alas, it seems that the brashness and loud noises are all that there is of Geller; the man and the 'phenomenon' are one.

Jonathan Margolis has worked very hard and done a most conscientious job with this biography. It ranges through Geller's unsettled early childhood, a 'light' which stunned him in a Tel Aviv garden (this is possibly his first UFO

encounter), the production of his first 'marvels', his adulterous father and bread-winning mother, his spell in a kibbutz semi-orphanage, and migration to Cyprus, where he attended an English-style school run by monks. In Cyprus his mother ran a small hotel, where Geller first came to know the glamour of show-biz via some of the guests, the joys of sex, a mysterious man from Mossad, and ambition. After service and wounds in the Six-Day War, Geller teamed up with 'Shipi' (now his brother-in-law and manager) and started the basis of his stage act. By dint of assiduous socializing he was soon the talk of Israel's 'glitterati', and came to the notice of Dr Andrija Puharich — an idiosyncratic US scientist who, after another UFO experience or so (much of it under hypnosis) provided the connections for Geller to go, in 1971, straight into the 'alternative' scientific circles then popular in USA. The (still controversial) Targ and Puthoff tests on his abilities followed in 1972 and 1974, and were published in *Nature*. Great efforts of 'social mountaineering', as the book puts it, gave Geller a spell on the fringes of the CIA, and a niche in the entourage of the Mexican President.

In 1984 he left the US and is now settled, in something akin to retirement, in a large Thames-side house near Reading. Thus the career of Geller to date, an astonishingly large amount of which is corroborated by witnesses of various sorts recalling what they believe they saw and remarked upon, right from the earliest times.

Consideration of the key question, 'Magician or Mystic?' is the under-theme of this biography. Jonathan Margolis, who is obviously very impressed by him, concludes "... rather than being the most brilliant illusionist ever, Uri Geller may merely be paranormal". The author has spent many hours with Geller and has witnessed extraordinary effects whilst in his company under conditions which, for those who would see the world in terms of a psi-testing laboratory, gave Geller all possible freedom to control events. The author, along with countless others, may very well have been hoodwinked, therefore. Nonetheless, he reports two interesting occurrences of metal bending all on its own, once in the case of a spoon held by his son, and on another occasion when a spoon Geller had 'kinked' was left on the front seat of a TV crew's van and "... heading down the A40, the spoon ... literally went to about forty-five degrees. It was by itself, sitting on the front seat of the van. No one was touching it. We actually saw it moving." If this is so, then something extraordinary is connected with Geller. Who, amongst those interviewed for the book, might have a worthwhile opinion?

A quick comparison of this book's index with the inner front cover of *JSPR* throws up the name of Prof. Arthur Ellison, who, so far as I can see, is the only SPR authority Margolis has contacted. This, if so, is surely a sorry oversight, though whether by the author or the SPR in past years, I do not know. Prof. Ellison describes the bending, by Geller's stroking it upon a flat metal surface, of a Yale key contributed by Arthur C. Clarke, and states frankly that he saw it occur and detected no trickery. He states "I think he [Geller] is important in that he shows certain things that some normal scientists consider impossible are not impossible." He adds much more that is balanced, considered, and too long for this review. Many other 'respectable' academics have also been able to examine Geller in action.

Specific tests on Geller, and some metal-bending children, were carried out by Prof. John Hasted in the 1970s. Geller, and some of the children, impressed him, though he detected fraud in others. Margolis has tracked down a few of the children, who are chary of interview. The only quotation he gives from one of them is, "It was all perfectly genuine, and please give my best wishes to Prof. Hasted. But I wouldn't want my friends and neighbours to know what happened back then, and have all those accusations about attention-seeking starting again." It appears, also, that these children were all highly-strung, miserable, and at odds with their fathers—in these respects just like the young Geller, for what this may be worth. So, is this gold in the dross?

David Berglas, master magician, was also involved with child metal-benders in those days. "... we got Customs men, trained in close observation, to watch, but not one of them detected anything untoward. They would swear they had seen a spoon bend, but I saw as a magician that the children had cheated. They were very, very adept, and what made it more complicated was that a lot of them genuinely thought they weren't cheating. They were self-deluded. Just bear one thing in mind. Uri, whom I love very dearly as a friend, never does anything in front of me." Nor, it appears, has Geller submitted himself to any properly conducted tests since 1987. He says of himself, "It still astonishes me after all these years. I'm amazed and transfixed and excited by all these phenomena." However, he does not appear very keen to have them investigated and better understood.

Let us recall that this book is a biography, not a probing analysis of 'the Geller Phenomenon'. The author, amongst many other intelligent and worthy people, sees something in Geller's effects which goes beyond mere trickery. He also records the effect Geller has upon the people who associate with him. Prof. Hasted and his wife were subjected to what were, in effect, poltergeist disturbances at the time he was testing Geller, and others claim similar upsets, origins unknown. On stage, David Berglas has 'magicked' ladies from his audiences into metal-bar-bending superwomen. Was this trickery, speculates Margolis, or a feat of mind over matter, engendered by some means that Geller, too, is using? The author himself has bent spoons at the behest of Gary Sinclair, a Californian 'therapist'—who presumably supplied them for the purpose. There may be something going on here, but this book does not provide any breakthrough by way of enlightening us as to what it might be. As a biography, that is not its purpose.

However, it must certainly be the case that this book contains only a fraction of the material gathered to compile it. Mr Margolis might well be doing psi investigation, and fraud elimination, a favour if he were prepared to put all this material at the disposal of a competent group of people, such as the SPR, and allow them to see if any 'gold', in terms of new knowledge or insights, can be panned from it. I hope he may consider this course as an extension of the fine biographical work he has already done by producing this most readable book.

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